

2003

AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN,

ON THE PROPRIETY OF ABSTAINING FROM

West India Sugar and Rum.

*Why did all-creating Nature
Make the plant for which we toil?
Sighs must fan it, Tears must water
Sweat of ours must dress the Soil.
Think ye Masters, iron-hearted,
Lolling at your jovial Boards,
Think how many Backs have smarted
For the Sweets you Can't afford!*

COWPER's Negro's Complaint.

The Sixth Edition, with Additions.

Sold by M. GUENAY, No. 128, Holborn-Hill, C. FORSTER,
No. 41, Poultry, and W. DARTON and Co. No. 55, Grace-
church-Street. 1791.

Price 1d. or four for 3d. nine for 6d. nineteen for 1s. or fifty
for 2s. 6d.

Notwithstanding the late determination of the House of Commons on the Slave-Trade, we may hope, that the discussion it has received will not be useless; and that the public attention has not been excited in vain, to a system of cruelty which it is painful even to recite. It may be hoped that, claiming for ourselves the most perfect freedom, we shall no longer impose upon others a slavery the most oppressive; and that, enjoying a degree of felicity unequalled in any age or country, we shall no longer range the world to increase the misery of mankind.

The lust of power, and the pride of conquest, have doubtless produced instances far too numerous, of man enslaved by man. But we, in an enlightened age, have greatly surpassed, in brutality and injustice, the most ignorant and barbarous ages: and while we are pretending to the finest feelings of humanity, are exercising unprecedented cruelty. We have planted slavery in the rank soil of sordid avarice; and the produce has been misery in the extreme. We have ascertained, by a course of experiments in cruelty, the least portion of nourishment requisite to enable man to linger a few years in misery, the greatest quantity of labour, which in such a situation, the extreme of punishment can extort; and the utmost degree of pain, labour, and hunger united, that the human frame can endure.

In vain have such scenes been developed. The wealth derived from the horrid traffic, has created an influence that secures its continuance; unless the people at large shall refuse to receive the produce of robbery and murder.

The Legislature having refused to interpose, the people are now necessarily called on, either to reprobate or approve the measure; for West-India-Slavery must depend upon their support for its existence, and it is in the power of every individual to increase, or to diminish its extent. The laws of our country may indeed prohibit us the sugar-cane, unless we will receive it through the medium of slavery. They may hold it to our lips, steeped in the blood of our fellow-creatures; but they cannot compel us to accept the loathsome potion. With us it rests, either to receive it and be partners in the crime, or to exonerate ourselves from guilt, by spurning from us the temptation. For let us not



think, that the crime rests alone with those who conduct the traffic, or the legislature by whom it is protected: if we purchase the commodity we participate in the crime. The slave-dealer, the slave-holder, and the slave-driver, are virtually the agents of the consumer, and may be considered as employed and hired by him to procure the commodity. For, by holding out the temptation, he is the original cause, the first mover in the horrid process; and every distinction is done away by the moral maxim, That whatever we do by another, we do ourselves.

Nor are we by any means warranted to consider our individual share in producing these evils in a trivial point of view. The consumption of sugar in this country is so immense, that the quantity commonly used by individuals will have an important effect. A family that uses 5lb. of sugar per week, with the proportion of rum, will, by abstaining from the consumption 21 months, prevent the slavery or murder of one fellow-creature; eight such families in 19½ years, prevent the slavery or murder of 100, and 38,000 would totally prevent the Slave Trade to supply our islands. Nay, so necessarily connected are our consumption of the commodity, and the misery resulting from it, that in every pound of sugar used, (the produce of slaves imported from Africa) we may be considered as consuming two ounces of human flesh, besides destroying an alarming number of seamen by the slave-trade, and spreading inconceivable anguish, terror, and dismay, through an immense continent, by the burning of their villages, tearing parents from their families, and children from their parents; breaking every bond of society, and destroying every source of human happiness: a French writer observes, "That he cannot look on a piece of sugar without conceiving it stained with spots of human blood:" and Dr. Franklin adds, that had he taken in all the consequences, "he might have seen the sugar not merely spotted, but thoroughly dyed scarlet in grain."

Dreadful consideration, that our increasing happiness and prosperity has spread desolation and misery over a country as large as all Europe! For it is an indisputable fact, that it is British luxury, the African Slave Trade depends on for

support : they have increased, and they would fall together. For our consumption of sugar is now so immense, that it nearly equals that of all Europe besides ; and Jamaica now supplies more than all our West-India Islands did at any period prior to 1755.

But amazingly extensive as is the increase of the culture, so far is it from keeping pace with our luxury, that (before the disturbances in the French Islands, within these two or three years) sugars have ever sold in the British market 20 or 30, sometimes 50 per cent. dearer than in any other part of the world ; and it is not to support the old plantations as is pretended, but to form new ones, for the supply of this our increasing luxury, that the wretched Africans are torn from their native land.

Let us then imagine our immense consumption wholly, or in great part to cease, and our sugars to be thrown on the foreign markets ; would additional slaves be wanted to supply an overflowing market at a falling price ? No ! The African Slave Trade, by whomsoever conducted, to supply sugar colonies, by whatever nation possessed, must totally cease. Horror and dismay would give place to peace and civilization, through a coast of above three thousand miles extent, and above a thousand miles inland : for so extensive are our depredations, and so extensive are the benefits which it is in our power to confer. Nor would the beneficial effects cease, even here. The West-India islands, finding less demand for sugar, must appropriate less ground to the sugar-cane, and leave more for provisions : the slaves would be less worked, better fed, and in a few years consist intirely of native creoles. Or if the planters appropriate the land to the other productions of the island, the same beneficial effects must ensue : for Mr. Cooke tells us, “ the “ cultivation of cotton, pimento, and coffee, is easier than “ sugar : the Slaves look better, and increase faster ; ” and instead of requiring additional slaves, they would be able to increase their plantations with those already in the Islands. For Governor Parry says, “ one acre of sugar requires as “ much labour as three of cotton.” Thus our refraining from the consumption of the sugar-cane, even for a few years, would destroy the Slave Trade to the West-India

Islands, bring fresh land into culture, and place the slaves in such a situation, that they must rapidly increase.

The diminution of the consumption of West-India produce, would also have a powerful effect by sinking the price of the commodity; and thereby take away the temptation to import additional slaves. The effect a small variation in the supply or demand has on the price, we have recently experienced. The disturbances in the French sugar islands, has suddenly raised some of the markets, which were 20 or 30 per cent. lower than the British, much above it; and thereby occasioned an exportation from this country to supply the deficiency: and our exportation, though only amounting to a 10th of our importation, has raised our sugars 50 per cent. And as a fall in the price would obstruct the Slave Trade, and meliorate the condition of the slaves; so this rise will produce effects the most baneful. The planter, tempted by the high price to get sugar and rum to market while that high price continues, will deprive his slaves of their provision grounds, to plant them with canes; and by the energy of the whip, they will be forced to the most extreme exertions. The murder, or, in the technical language of the West-Indies, the loss of his slaves, will be to him but a secondary consideration. The large crop, and the high price, will amply compensate him: and the question now is, not merely whether we shall hold out to him an inducement to purchase additional slaves; but whether we shall tempt him to murder those he already has. We can hardly doubt, but that West India packets have already borne the murderous dispatches, expressed in language too dreadfully explicit, and to the following effect. "The price of sugar and rum still continues high. You must adopt every mode to forward as large a cargo as possible. A fortunate crisis now offers itself for extricating my estate from the difficulties in which it is involved. We must avail ourselves of it: another may never occur. Consequences, though disagreeable, must at the present moment be overlooked. The slave market is still open for a supply. *New-fangled humanity is no more.*" The day hardly dawns when the whip resounds through those regions of horror; nor ceases, till darkness

closes the scene, which day after day is renewed. The miserable victims, destitute of every source of comfort to body or to mind, and sinking under the three endemic diseases of our islands, hunger, torture, and extreme labour; and urged to exertions they are unable to sustain, at length expire beneath the lash, which in vain endeavours to rouse them to a renewal of their labour.

As neither the slave-dealer, nor the planter, can have any moral right to the person of him they stile their slave, to his labour, or to the produce of it; so they can convey no right in that produce to us: and whatever number of hands it may pass through, if the criminal circumstances appertaining to it be known to them at the time of the transier, they can only have a criminal possession: and the money paid, either for the slave, or for the produce of his labour, is paid to obtain that criminal possession; and can confer no moral right whatever. So, if the death of the person called a slave, be occasioned by the criminal possession, the criminal possessor is guilty of murder; and we, who have knowingly done any act which might occasion his being in that situation, are accessaries to the murder before the fact; as by receiving the produce of his labour, we are accessaries to the robbery, after the fact.

If we, as individuals concerned in the Slave Trade (either by procuring the slaves, compelling them to labour, or receiving the produce) imagine that our share in the transaction is so minute that it cannot perceptibly increase the injury; let us recollect that, though numbers partaking of a crime may diminish the shame, they cannot diminish its turpitude. Can we suppose, that an injury of enormous magnitude can take place, and the criminality be destroyed merely by the criminals becoming so numerous as to render their respective shares indistinguishable? Were an hundred assassins to plunge their daggers into their victim, though each might plead, that without his assistance the crime would have been compleated, and that his poniard neither occasioned nor accelerated the murder, yet every one of them would be guilty of the intire crime. For into how many parts soever a criminal action may be divided, the crime itself rests intire and compleat on every perpetrator.

But waving this latter consideration, and even supposing for a moment, that the evil has an existence from causes totally independent of us. Yet it exists, and as we have it in our power jointly with others, to remedy it; it is undoubtedly our duty to contribute our share, in hope that others will theirs; and to act that part from conscience, which we should from inclination in similar cases, that interested our Feelings.

For instance; let us suppose the Algerines to establish sugar plantations, and resort to the banks of the Thames for slaves, as the only place to be insulted with impunity. Suppose our wives, our husbands, our children, our parents, our brethren, swept away, and the fruit of their labour, produced with agonizing hearts and trembling limbs, landed at the port of London. What would be our conduct? Should we say, sugar is a necessary of life, I cannot do without it; besides the quantity I use is but a small proportion, and though it is very criminal of the Algerines to enslave others, yet I am not bound to look to the nature or consequences of the transaction; and paying for the sugar, I have a right to consume it, however it may have been obtained. If such would be our language in that case; be it so on the present occasion, for let us recollect that the only difference is, that in one case our relation to the enslaved is rather more remote, but that in both cases they are our brethren.

But it is hardly requisite to state so strong a case as that supposed: For were only one Englishman to receive injuries, that bore but the slightest resemblance to those daily committed in our islands, the nation would be inflamed with resentment, and clamorous to avenge the injury. And can our pride suggest to us, that the rights of men are limited to any nation, or to any colour? Or, were any one to treat a fellow creature in this country as we do the unhappy Africans in the West-Indies; struck with horror, we should be zealous to deliver the oppressed, and punish the oppressor. Are then the offices of humanity and functions of justice to be circumscribed by geographical boundaries? Can reason, can conscience justify this contrast in our conduct, between our promptitude in

the one case, and our torpor in the other?—Mr. Addison justly observes, that “humanity to become estimable must be combined with justice!” But we seem to act as if we thought that the relief of our fellow-creatures, protection from injuries, communication of benefits, were works of supererogation, to be granted or withheld, as caprice, or custom, or inclination may suggest.

After the important considerations adduced, it might be reckoned a degradation of the subject to mention the national dignity; or even that might induce us to counteract a powerful body of men, who are trampling under foot, the dictates of humanity, and the interest of the nation: men, who, have in 50 years received for sugar alone, above 70 millions more than it would have cost at any other market. And from Mr. Botham’s evidence it appears, that in Batavia, where labour is as high as in England, sugar, equal to the best West-India, is sold at 1d & per pound. These are the men, who are endeavouring to overthrow a plan for supplying us with sugars, by means of free labour; and have the audacity to tell the British legislature, “That they cannot abolish the slave trade; for that if England refuses to furnish them with slaves, they will obtain a supply through other channels.” And a governor of Barbadoes, admonishes us, “From policy, to leave the Islands to the quiet management of their own affairs.” These nominal colonies have, it seems, been taught, that we have no right to controul them; that the acts of their assemblies alone are obligatory; and that those of British legislators, are binding only on those whom they represent. The right of enslaving others, they contend for, as the most valuable of their privileges.

Thus it appears, that the legislature is not only unwilling, but perhaps unable, to grant redress; and therefore it is more peculiarly incumbent on us; *To abstain from the use of sugar and rum, until our West-India Planters themselves have prohibited the importation of additional slaves, and commenced as speedy and effectual a subversion of slavery in their islands, as the circumstances and situation of the slaves will admit: or till we can obtain the produce of the sugar cane in some other mode, unconnected with slavery, and*

unpolluted with blood.

For surely it may be hoped that we shall not limit our views merely to the abolition of the African slave trade, as the colonial slavery formed on it, is in its principle equally unjust, for if it be iniquitous to force the Africans from their native land; equally iniquitous must it be, to retain them and their posterity in perpetual bondage, and though the African slave trade be the most prominent feature in this wickedness; yet it is but a feature: and were it abolished, the West India slavery would still exist. Our planters would breed, instead of importing slaves; and shall we suffer half a million of fellow subjects, and their posterity, to be held in slavery for ever? I say fellow subjects, for undoubtedly, every person born in the dominions of Great Britain, is a subject, bound to obey and entitled to the protection of the common law of England; and in opposition to which, the acts of assemblies, existing merely by grant from the crown, can be of no authority.

In demanding liberty then for the persons called slaves in our Islands, we demand no more than they are entitled to by the common law of the land. The most eligible mode of putting them in possession of their legal and natural right, may be a question of difficulty; but it is a question that ought to be considered with no other view, but to their happiness. The plan to be adopted, ought to be certain and speedy in its operation, without any consideration of the supposed, or even real interest, of their oppressors: and let it be remembered, that it is in the power of a small proportion of the people of England to effect it, by refusing to receive the produce. For the planters themselves would adopt the plan, were that the only condition on which we would consume the produce of their islands: nor would the legislature be then harassed with preposterous claims for compensation; which, however unfounded in justice or reason, will be supported by influence, and enforced with clamour.

The case now fully lies before us; and we have to make our choice, either to join ourselves with these manufacturers of human woe, or to renounce the horrid association. If we adopt the former, let us at least have the

candour to avow our conduct in its real deformity. Let us no longer affect to deplore the calamities attendant on the Slave Trade, of which we are the primary cause: nor let us pretend to execrate the conduct of the slave-dealer, the slave-holder, or the slave-driver; but apologize for them as our partners in iniquity: and be assured, that if we now take *our* share in the transaction, we should, were we placed in a similar situation with them, with as little compunction take *theirs*; unless we can suppose the order of nature would be so far inverted, as that we should become virtuous, in proportion as the temptation to vice increased. Nor should we then, any more than now, be destitute of subterfuges to destroy the feelings of our minds, and the convictions of our consciences.

If ignorance and inattention may be pleaded as our excuse hitherto, yet that can be the case no longer. The subject has been four years before the public. Its dreadful wickedness has been fully proved. Every falshood, every deception with which it has been disguised, has been compleatly done away; and it stands before us in all its native horrors. No longer can it be pretended, that Africa is a barbarous, uncultivated land, inhabited by a race of savages inferior to the rest of the human species. Mr. How, who was employed by government to go up the country, deposes, that inland it is every where well cultivated, abounding with rice, millet, potatoes, cotton and indigo plantations; and that the inhabitants are quick in learning languages, and remarkably industrious, hospitable and obliging. It appears that they possess noble and heroic minds, disdaining slavery, and frequently seeking refuge from it in the arms of death. Nor shall we be again told, of the superior happiness they enjoy under the benevolent care of the planters, Mr. Coor having deposed; that "setting slaves to work in the morning, is attended with loud peals of whipping;"—and General Tottenham, "that there is no comparison between regimental flogging, which only cuts the skin, and the plantation, which cuts out the flesh;"—Capt. Hall, "that the punishments are very shocking, much more so than in men of war;" Capt. Smith, "that at every stroke of the whip a piece of

“flesh is cut out,”—and Mr. Ross, “that he considers a comparison between West-India slaves and the British peasantry, as an insult to common sense.”

We are now called on to redress evils, in comparison with which, all that exist in this nation sink beneath our notice; and the only sacrifice we are required to make in order to effect it, is the abandoning of a luxury, which habit alone can have rendered of importance. If we refuse, can we form the least pretence to a moral character? May it not be justly inferred, that those numerous displays of humanity, of which this kingdom boasts, have not their foundation in any virtuous or valuable principle, but that to custom and ostentation they owe their origin? And if our execration of the slave trade be any more than mere declamation against crimes we are not in a situation to commit, we shall instead of being solicitous to find despicable distinctions to justify our conduct, abhor the idea of contributing, in the least degree, to such scenes of misery.

If these be the deductions from the most obvious principles of reason, justice, and humanity; what must be the result if we extend our views to religious considerations. It will hardly be said, that we assume a religious profession to diminish the extent of our moral duties, or to weaken the force of our obligation to observe them.

We will therefore ask, if it be meant to insult the God we pretend to worship, by supplicating him to “have mercy upon all prisoners and captives,” and to “defend and provide for the fatherless, widows, and children, and all that are desolate and oppressed.” But, if the national religion be a mere matter of form, yet surely we may expect that the various denominations of dissenters, will think it at the least, as requisite to dissent from the national crimes, as the national religion, unless they mean to exhibit consciences of so peculiar a texture, as to take offence at the religion of their country, while they can conform without scruple, to its most criminal practices. If indeed they are satisfied, after an impartial examination, that the traffic alluded to is fair and honest, and that the produce ought to be considered as the result of lawful commerce, it will become them to encourage it, in

will become them to reprobate this work as an attempt to slander honest men, and to injure their property, by holding it out to the public, as the produce of robbery and murder; but, if the arguments be valid, will they presume to treat the subject with cool indifference, and continue a criminal practice. May we not also hope that the Methodists, who appear to feel forcibly their principles, will seriously consider it: they are so numerous, as to be able of themselves to destroy that dreadful traffic, which is the sole obstacle to their ministers spreading the gospel in the extensive continent of Africa; and, however, others may affect to degrade the negroes, they are bound to consider thousands of them as their brethren in Christ.

But there is one class of dissenters who justly stand high in the public estimation, for their steady, manly and uniform opposition to our colonial slavery; and can it be supposed, that after having awakened the public attention, they can refuse to contribute what is in their own power to remedy the evil. The plan proposed, is a plain and obvious deduction from their uniform principle, of having no concern in what they disapprove. Thus, considering war as unlawful, they consider goods obtained through that medium, as criminally obtained, and will not suffer any of their members to purchase prize-goods, and surely they must consider the seizure of a mans goods, as a crime far inferior to the seizing his person.

But, however obvious the duty, they may possibly feel no conviction of conscience in the breach of it, as the mind hardened by habit, admits with difficulty the conviction of guilt; and sanctioned by a common practice, we may commit the grossest violations of duty without remorse. It is therefore more peculiarly incumbent on us in such situations, to examine our conduct with the utmost suspicion, and fortify our minds with moral principle or the sanctions of religion. In proportion as we are under their influence, we shall exert ourselves to remedy these evils, knowing that our example, our admonitions, our influence may produce remote effects: of which we can form no estimate, and which after having done our duty, must be left to him who governs all things after the counsel of his own will.

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